

A New Hope

Psalm 130

March 4, 2012

Introduction:

One of the places Karen and I went on our honeymoon was the Grand Canyon. While we were there, we decided to try to hike part-way down the Canyon on one of the trails. So we took the trail down to the mile and a half marker and decided that was far enough since we weren't in good enough physical condition to hike all the way to the bottom. Shortly after we starting going back up, the sky began to grow dark and the wind picked up, which kicked up dirt into our eyes. This was not very helpful as we began to realize that taking the path back up was going to be considerably more difficult than it was going down. Before long, our legs were sore, we were out of breath, the rain was coming down, and the trail seemed to continue on forever as it zigzagged up the Canyon's walls. All we wanted was to just get back to the top and rest in the shelter of our hotel room. Thankfully, after a long and difficult march up that path, we finally made it out.

This morning we're going to travel together upwards along a path, but this path begins not in a canyon but in the depths of the human heart. Psalm 130 describes a journey upwards from a dark valley of despair and hopelessness to a place of joy, hope, and security. It is a path I believe many of us will recognize because we have once traveled it ourselves or because it is the path which we currently find ourselves traveling on.

So let's begin that journey by opening your Bible with me to Psalm 130. This is a short Psalm so we're going to read it through all at once and then I'll walk us through it step by step. So please follow along as I read Psalm 130 from the ESV. **"A song of ascents. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities."**

We going to consider this Psalm by breaking it down into four parts by asking of it four questions that will move us up out of a valley into a place of hope. So let's begin with the first question we want to answer, which is...

1. Who is this man? (v. 1-2)

We can give a few different answers to this question and the first answer is that **he is everyman**. Notice first off the Psalm title. It is simply called "A song of ascents" which means this was one of the psalms Israelites would sing as they went up to Jerusalem for annual feasts. But note what it does not say; it doesn't give a name to who wrote it. Many psalms state that they are "of David" or were written by someone else. But here there is no name attached to it. This Psalm isn't connected to a specific person or a

situation. It was meant to be sung by every Israelite as part of the celebration of the feasts. As a result, the words of this Psalm are to be an expression of the hearts of all believers. These words are to reflect the experience of every man and woman. They are our words as much as they are the words of the individual who originally penned it.

But these words also describe **a desperate man**. He begins, “**Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord!**” Something has happened that he finds himself in a dark place. His life has sunk down so low that he feels like he’s in a shadowy pit or a gloomy dungeon he cannot get out of. Have you ever found yourself in a place like that? Have you ever found yourself in a pit of deep, dark desperate despair in your life? I can’t imagine many of us here who haven’t at one time or another.

Sometimes **circumstances** beyond our control can bring us low. Someone we love suddenly dies. The doctor gives us the news that we have cancer. The job we were depending on is lost due to downsizing. The retirement savings we were banking on is cut in half by an unexpected economic downturn in the stock market. Suddenly you find yourself facing a situation you didn’t expect and it’s a weight upon you.

Also the **people** in our lives have the power to devastate us. We trusted our spouse, and he or she betrayed that trust. The dreams we had for our children are shattered by the unwise choices they’ve made. Friends we thought we could confide in, who would support us through thick and thin, turn out to be fair-weather friends, turning their backs on us just when we needed them the most.

And sometimes the depths of despair come to us because of our own **sin**. We know what we have done: our pride, our lust, our additions, our unrestrained greed and envy, our self-centered pursuit of our desires at all cost – eventually the rooster comes home to roost. Your sinful behavior begins to destroy your family, your job, your relationships, and your health. You find yourself in a bed of your own making, a bed in the depth of the mess you’ve made of your life.

All of those things can bring us down pretty low. We’ve all been there; maybe some of you are there right now. Beneath the thin veneer of our pleasantries and forced smiles there lie a depth of hurt and sorrow along with a nagging sense of hopelessness. You understand precisely what the psalmist is saying because you’re living it every day.

But one more observation about this man is in order: we also see that this man is **a praying man**. Having come to the end of his rope, worn down by discouragement and despair, he cries out to God in prayer. He realizes that he no longer has anywhere else to turn but to God. The circumstances of life have devastated him, people whom he trusted have failed him, and even his own strength and moral goodness have been shown to be but a mirage. Life has devastated him. Now at the lowest point, he calls to God in prayer.

So then next question we should ask is: who then is this God to whom he cries out to? When we are in those valleys of life where the road is dark and we feel crushed by the trials we are experiencing, is God going to be able to help us in our need?

2. Who is this God? (v. 3-4)

Look back in your Bibles with me as I read v. 3-4. **“If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.”** Just as we made a number of observations about who this man is, so also we can draw out a few characteristics of who God is.

First, **he’s a holy judge.** God’s character is such that he is **“holy,”** without sin in any respect. And his holiness has implications for those made in his image. Scripture tells us that we’re to be holy because he is holy. Yet, none of us have met his holy standard. We’ve all failed to live righteously in thought, word, and deed. Thus the psalmist asks, **“If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities... who could stand?”** Answer: none. Were God to open up the book of our lives that recorded a tally mark for every time we’ve sinned, we’d be unable to stand and proclaim our innocence before him because our books would be thick, filled with page upon page of tally marks. All of our excuses for sin and our pretense for goodness would be totally shattered. We wouldn’t be able to blame it on our difficult childhood, our environment, our friends, or claim it really wasn’t such a big deal. Those excuses won’t fly with God. Before God on the basis of our lives, we’d only face his wrath and judgment because we would be without excuse.

But thankful God’s description does not end there. The psalmist goes on to say in v. 4, **“But with you there is forgiveness.”** Besides being a holy, he’s also a **forgiving God.** Here’s the first ray of hope that shines into the valley of darkness the psalmist is in. If God is only holy, there’s no hope, for none can stand before his righteous wrath against sin. But he also forgives. He pardons. He does not count our sin against us. He satisfies his wrath against our sin by sending his Son to become a man, live a sinless life, and take our punishment for us. The Son of God dies in our place on the cross so our sins are forgiven.

But not only is he a holy God that judges sin and a forgiving God who atones for sin but as a result of this, he’s the Psalm also describes him as a God to be **feared.** Look at how v. 4 ends. **“But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.”**

Isn’t that a surprising way to end that sentence? You would think it would read, “But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be *praised or worshiped or glorified.* The idea of God’s forgiveness doesn’t lend itself to the idea of fearing God in most of our minds. So what’s going on here? Why should God’s forgiveness lead us to fear him?

I think we are to fear God because God is Other – he is far beyond our comprehension. He is not like us. We fear the unknown, fear being in the presence of one who is way beyond us in power and might. For example, the scariest movies are those where you don’t get to see the threat. Since you cannot see it, you can’t comprehend it and that causes you to fear it. I think that’s why a movie like *The Blair Witch Project* did so well back in the day. You never got to see what the filmmakers were facing out there in the woods. We fear the unknown. But this even holds true with what we do know. If you get to meet the President of the United States, chances are you are going to be a little

nervous. Why? Because he has power. He's often referred to as the most powerful man on the face of the earth. We are naturally fearful when we come face to face with someone who wields great power.

So if that's the case on a human level, how much more so with God! He is all-powerful. He speaks the universe into being. He is utterly holy, without sin or fault, so that when the prophet Isaiah gets a glimpse of him he cries out, "Woe is me, I am ruined!" God is to be feared because he is so totally unlike us; he is completely Other.

I think that's the idea here. God is so vastly different than we are, so much greater, so much more powerful, so holy, that we can't help but have fear of him. And although we may not think of it as such, God's forgiveness should fall under that category of his total Otherness. God's forgiveness is entirely incomprehensible because it is so Other than what we are like. See, I can understand God's judgment. Sinners get the punishment they deserve. You steal, you get punished. You murder, you go to jail. The judgment of God is totally comprehensible to me. We are so very much like God when it comes to judgment. My girls will complain "That's not fair" because they expect justice; they never say, "That's not compassionate" or "That's not merciful" because that's not our normal setting. So when we consider God's forgiveness of sin, we enter into a place that is incomprehensible; it is there we find God to be totally Other than we are.

Let's think about this for a moment. Romans 5:8 says that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Can we ever even begin to understand what this means? While we were still sinners, rebelling against God in our every thought and deed, mocking him, whipping him, gleefully pushing the crown of thorns into his head, driving the cold long nails through his hands and feet, and taunting him as he struggled to take his last heaving breaths upon a cross ... and all the while he could have put a stop to it if he had willed it! The same voice which had spoken galaxies into existence could have called down ten thousand angels to execute his righteous judgment upon all of mankind chose instead to merely whisper, "Father, forgive them". *Who is this God?*

Think for a moment of your own life. Focus on the sins which you have committed just this morning, much less this past week. How many commandments have you broken? Can you say that you have loved God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength since you've walked into church this morning, much less your entire life? God knows each and every sin which we have done, are doing, and will yet do. Furthermore, he knows the same for the person next to you and for every man, woman, and child who has ever lived on this earth. And since God loves outside of time, our sins are in the eternal present before Him. I can understand an outpouring of wrath and judgement, yet Scripture says that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son to die for us. Who is this God that would do such a thing? What kind of mercy, grace, and love have we discovered that God himself should pay such a price for our sins? Who is this God who is willing to cast our sins as far as the east is from the west?

That's why I think the psalmist says that God's forgiveness leads to fear, because we cannot comprehend a love that so recklessly grants grace instead of justice and does so at the price of his own Son. God is so different than us, so entirely Other than the

way we are, that fear must be part of the response to who he is. Who is this God? In so many ways, he is absolutely nothing that we would ever expect, yet is everything that we could ever hope and need!

So now that we've seen who God is and seen our own reflection in the writer of this Psalm, we need to move on to our third question...

3. What should we do? (v. 5-6)

Look back in your Bibles and follow along with me as I read v. 5-6. **“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.”** We're to wait on God. In the midst of trials, when life is dark and we are dwelling in the valley of the shadow of death, we are to simply trust in him and place our faith in his promises.

So what does this idea of waiting entail? First, it involves **dependency**. It shows that we cannot do anything to speed up the person we wait for. The ball is in someone else's court. I think of growing up in Milwaukee where I used to have to take the city bus to school every day. I'd go out and wait for the bus but I couldn't do anything to speed up its arrival. I had no control over it. Waiting for God means we recognize we are dependent on him. We don't get to set timetables or dictate God's provision.

Second, it involves **trust**. Within the act of waiting is an implicit trust that what we are waiting for will come to pass. I would wait at the bus stop every morning because I had trust that eventually a bus would come. If I didn't think one would ever come, I'd never bother to wait. My waiting assumes some confidence or trust in the thing waited upon. So waiting on God is an act of faith; we wait because we trust that he will come and deliver us from our valley or despair.

Third, waiting involves a sense of **longing**. We are willing to wait for the things which we desire. I waited to catch a bus because I longed to get to my destination quickly rather than walk five miles to school. Because we long for God's deliverance, we are willing to wait for him. We long for things to be different and so we wait for God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

In this passage, the waiting is described as watchmen waiting for the morning. Having taken long road trips into the night, I can understand this... I could do nothing to make the sun rise and sooner than it was; I had a large amount of confidence that it would rise, so I kept watching for it; I longed for the light of morning more than the night so there was a desire in me for morning to come.

This is exactly what God calls for us to do. He wants us to wait upon him. If you're not a believer, you need to see that due to your sin, there is nothing you can do to save yourself from God's wrath. You're completely dependent upon God to save you. You need to trust him at his word that if you come to Christ in faith, and believe that Jesus paid for your sins on the cross, you can be forgiven. And you need to long for him. You need to sincerely want a relationship with him rather than continuing in the

darkness of your sin and the despair of life without him. You must want him more than anything else this world has to offer.

And as believers, as Christians who like the psalmist are crying out to God in the midst of trials and struggles that have discouraged you and brought you down, you must wait on God. God is faithful – the one whom you trust will never leave you or fail you. God promises to work all things for the God of those who love him, no matter how dark the night might seem around you at present. Wait on God by trusting in God. Do not give into despair. Do not think for a moment that God has abandoned you. God holds you firmly in his grip, like a strong father holds the hand of his little child crossing a busy street. You may be scared and tempted to flee but God will not let you go! Though you may not understand why you are going through the valley right now, God is still sovereign. He is in control, he is at work, and he will see to it to protect you and be present with you in the midst of whatever it is you are facing.

That now brings us to the final point, which concerns what God will do in response to our waiting upon him in faith.

4. What God will do (v. 7-8)

Follow along one last time as I read v. 7-8. **“O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”** As the psalmist places his hope in God he now testifies to others about what God has done for him. He points out two aspects of God in particular:

First, he says that with the Lord is **“steadfast love.”** Whereas all the other people in our lives will eventually fail to love us as we long to be loved, God will love us perfectly. God’s love will never betray us and nothing will ever come between us and his love. Paul says in Romans 8:38-39, *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* No matter what it is you are facing right now, be it a job loss or sickness or death, God’s love for you in Christ Jesus is unfailing. Hold on tight to that truth as we weather the dark storms that have some your way.

Second, with God is **“plentiful redemption.”** And by “plentiful” he means complete and total. Verse 8 says, **“he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”** Perhaps the cause of you being in the depths right now is because of your own sinful choices. You have come to recognize the destruction wrought by your sin and you fear perhaps you’ve crossed the line, that you’ve gone too far and passed the point of no return. But with God there is no such thing as “too far.” There is no depth of sin that you have fallen into that Christ cannot rescue you from.

This verse is reminding us that we need not wallow in depths of despair over our sin. When we wait on God, trusting in him to deliver us from sin’s power and penalty by looking to Christ as a perfect spotless Lamb who suffered in our stead on the cross, we

have full forgiveness. Christ died for every sin we've ever committed and ever will commit. **"All"** means all. The righteous judge you dread is also the forgiving Father who loves and who has provided a way to leave the depths of gloom and begin to live in light of his mercy and grace. Christ has atoned for all your sins: you only need to cry out to him in faith and receive the salvation that God has purchased for you in Christ.

Conclusion

So as we close, let me encourage you who are Christians to follow the path out of the dark depths you are facing by walking in the footsteps of the psalmist. Call out to God, wait on him in faith, and know that his promises to you are true. He will forgive you, he will redeem you, and he will love you with a steadfast love and be present with you through every trial. Never will he leave you nor forsake you. Wait on the Lord.

And for those of you who do not know the Lord, God doesn't want you to stay mired in the depths of sin and despair. He wants to give you an unshakable hope in his Son who died for you. There is a way out of the darkness. There is light and hope awaiting you. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. God invites you to turn away from the deeds of darkness and surrender yourself to him. Trust in the salvation God offers to you in Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

If that's you this morning, please join me as I close our time together in prayer.